

That's the most important thing, is to have a good economy for ordinary people.

Q. [Inaudible]—economy? In Mexico?

President Clinton. Where?

Q. In Mexico or the developing economies?

President Clinton. I just have to say, to me, just as an observer and a passionate supporter of democratic government over my lifetime, that of course Mexico has a lot of challenges. But if you look at this transformation you've made to a multiparty democracy, it's quite amazing that it's happened in a way that we've seen stability maintained, government's freedom to pursue a responsible economic course maintained. It's been very impressive to all of us who are on the outside looking in that Mexico has made a dramatic change in its political system, which I think will stand you in very good stead over the long run.

We find our competitive system—although none of us who are in office like competition—but our system has stabilized America over the long run. I think Mexico will be stabilized by the political transformation, but it's amazing that it's happened so quickly and so well. And so for me, the political developments there have been interesting and very impressive, very hopeful.

Q. You don't see any obstacles—

President Clinton. There are always obstacles. There will always be obstacles.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Organization of American States Hemispheric Arms Trafficking Convention November 14, 1997

Thank you very much, Mr. Gurria, Secretary General Gaviria, President Zedillo, distinguished permanent representatives of the Organization of American States, to all my fellow Americans who are here, and especially to two Members of our Congress, Senator Dodd and Congressman Gilman.

Today our 34 democracies are speaking with one voice, acting with one conviction, leading toward one goal, to stem the flow of illegal guns, ammunitions, and explosives in our hemisphere. Three years ago at the United Nations, the United States called on others to work with us to shut down the gray markets that outfit terrorists, drug traffickers, and criminals with guns.

Here at home we have prohibited arms dealers from acting as middlemen for illicit sales overseas, strengthened residency requirements for gun purchasers, banned foreign visitors from buying guns here in the United States, tightened export licenses to make sure that legally exported weapons are not diverted to illegal uses. But in an era where our borders are all more open to the flow of legitimate commerce, prob-

lems like trafficking in weapons and explosives simply cannot be solved by one nation alone.

Last May in Mexico, President Zedillo and I pledged to work together for a hemispherewide agreement to curb the illegal arms trade. I thank President Zedillo for Mexico's leadership. Mr. Secretary General, I thank you and the OAS member states for concluding this agreement in record time. We understand the magnitude of the problem. In the last year alone, thousands of handguns and rifles, hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition destined for illegal export have been seized in our nations.

The illegal export of firearms is indeed not just a hemispheric but a worldwide problem and demands an international response. Last year, the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms received approximately 30,000 requests just from OAS member states to trace weapons used in crimes. Gun trafficking is an issue of national security for all of us and a matter of neighborhood security for the Americas.

This convention will neither discourage nor diminish the lawful sale, ownership, or use of

guns, but it will help us to fight the unlawful trade in guns that contributes to the violence associated here in America with drugs and gangs.

If we want also here in America to see the powerful trend of democracy and free markets and peace in our hemisphere continue, we must also help our neighbors to fight the illegal trade in guns so that the foundations of democracies will not be eroded by violent crime and corruption.

Now, this convention mandates four key steps to achieve our common goals:

First, it requires countries to establish and maintain a strong system of export, import, and international transit licenses for arms, ammunitions, and explosives to make sure that weapons won't move without explicit permission from all the countries concerned.

Second, other nations will join us in putting markings on firearms, not only when they're made but also when they're imported. If guns are diverted from legal purposes, we will then be better able to trace their path and find out exactly when and how they got into the wrong hands.

Third, nations will adopt laws that criminalize illicit arms production and sales as we have already done, so that those who seek to profit from illegal trade in guns know they will pay a stiff penalty in jail.

Fourth, we will step up every level of information sharing from common routes used by arms traffickers to ways that smugglers are concealing their guns and tips on how to detect them. If we work together, we can put the black market in weapons out of business.

Let me say in a larger sense to all of you that this agreement underscores the new spirit of the Americas and the new dynamism of this organization. The mood of the negotiations was not one of recrimination but of cooperation on behalf of a common goal. We need more of that. Our hemisphere is setting a new standard for the world in taking on global challenges, last year with our pathbreaking convention against corruption, today with this arms traf-

ficking agreement. Together, we're showing the way of the 21st century world: democratic partners working together to improve the prosperity and security of all their people.

I'm especially pleased to be joined today, and to join you today, with President Zedillo. The United States and Mexico are working hard to forge a true partnership founded on mutual respect, a partnership as broad as our border is long. We see it taking shape in the creation of NAFTA, in our common commitment to the firearms convention, in our alliance against drug-trafficking, in our work with other American nations to increase multilateral cooperation and strengthen our hemispheric institutions to combat the scourge of drugs.

Over the last 2 days, the United States and Mexico have reached an agreement on extradition that will allow cross-border criminals to be tried in both countries while the evidence is still fresh. We've pledged to build a new Rio Grande bridge to help link our people together. We've taken an important step to fully demarcate our common border and agreed to promote environmental commercial cooperation. We've agreed also to work together to combat climate change, because developed and developing countries must reduce greenhouse gas emissions, together, that are warming the atmosphere.

Witnessing the signing of this important convention, I am especially proud of the renewed vitality of the OAS and the renewed deep cooperation between the United States and Mexico. It can make a difference for our entire community of nations, to build a better, safer future for all our people.

And now I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our good friend President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:32 p.m. in the Hall of the Americas at the Organization of American States. In his remarks, he referred to Jose Angel Gurria, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs; and Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General, Organization of American States.